

Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, ranking members Kissel and Fishbein and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Barbara Wheeler, I am from Southbury and a supporter of CT Against Gun Violence.

I am testifying in favor of HB-6355, An Act Concerning Risk Protection Orders.

Connecticut was the first state in the nation to pass an Extreme Risk Protection Order (ERPO) law in 1999. This program temporarily removes firearms from individuals judged to be at risk of imminent harm to themselves or others.

Now Connecticut has a low firearm suicide rate compared to other states but, still too many cases of suicide by gun and domestic violence. There is always room for improvement, please support HB-6355 now to strengthen the law to prevent additional deaths and gun violence. When the protection order expires, it should be a requirement that the subject is no longer at risk of violence before the firearms are returned. Strengthening this law will continue ERPOs due process protections. An ex parte process is used that is virtually the same as the one used for issuing domestic violence restraining orders. The subject is entitled to a court hearing before the order is extended beyond 14 days. There is no evidence that the process is used to harass gun owners; judges are required to have clear and convincing evidence to issue final risk protection orders.

There are often warning signs preceding violent or suicidal behavior, making this last-resort temporary removal measure an effective tool for reducing gun violence. Because firearm suicide accounts for up to two-thirds of gun deaths and is the second leading cause of suicide in Connecticut, there is an urgent need to strengthen our ERPO law to help it save more lives.

Thank you for your attention

Barbara Wheeler

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